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The Four Networks Theory of Power: A Theoretical Home for Power Structure Research

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This document explains why and how organizations are the starting point for understanding power. It focuses on four main organizational networks -- ideological, economic, military, and political -- as the building blocks for power structures. To provide a backdrop for understanding the American power structure, it then briefly applies the theory to Europe from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, showing how the economic and political networks gradually subordinated the ideological and military networks. Finally, it shows how the theory explains the class domination that characterizes the American power structure.

The theoretical starting point for power structure research is a seemingly mundane one, but that's what makes it very useful: *power is rooted in organizations*. From that humble beginning we can soon reach classes, states, the military and the ideological organizations that provide the basis for the collective search for meaning and forgiveness (organized religions).

Organizations at their most basic are simply sets of rules, roles, and routines developed to accomplish some particular purpose. They are ways of doing something together that people agree on, or at least accept for the time being. Religious rituals, for example, are routines that become the basis for the institutions called churches. The established routines for face-to-face economic exchanges become one basis for the more complex economic system of markets.

This too sounds very banal. But organizations can quickly become hierarchical and/or fierce when they begin to grow larger or face an outside threat. People will fight to hold on to their organizations. They like their roles and routines, which often become rituals.

Since human beings have a vast array of "purposes," they have formed an appropriately large number of organizations. But only a few of these purposes and organizations weigh heavily in terms of generating power.

According to sociologist Michael Mann's theory -- in my opinion, the theory that best suits power structure research -- the power structures within Western civilization, and probably other civilizations, too, are best understood by determining the intertwinings and relative importance at any given time of the organizations based in four "overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power" (Mann, 1986, p. 1). These networks are **ideological**, **economic**, **military**, and **political** -- "The IEMP model" for short.

It is important to stress right away that the theory is not derived from any psychological assumptions about the importance of different human purposes. Instead, the point is strictly sociological: these four networks happen to be the most useful organizational bases for generating power. In Mann's (1986, p. 2) words, "Their primacy comes not from the strength of human desires for ideological, economic, military, or political satisfaction but from the particular organizational means each possesses to attain human goals, whatever they may be."

In focusing on these four networks, Mann's concern is therefore with the "logistics" of power (1986, pp. 9-10, 518). In terms of human history, no one network comes first or is somehow more "basic" than the others. That is, each one always has presupposed the existence of the others. However, that does not mean that the networks are usually equal in their importance. Generally speaking, one or two networks usually are more dominant than the others. For

example, as I explain later in this document and elsewhere on this website, the economic network is predominant over the others in the United States, leading to class domination.

Furthermore, one kind of organizational power can be turned into any one of the others. Economic power can be turned into political power. Religious power can generate military power. Military power can conquer political power. And so on. In that sense, power is like the idea of "energy" in the natural sciences: it cannot be reduced to one primary form. Thus, there can be no "ultimate primacy" in the "mode of production" or "the normative system" or "the state," as in rival theories. Mann's summary statement on his overall framework is as follows:

A general account of societies, their structure, and their history can best be given in terms of the interrelations of what I call the four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military, and political (IEMP) relationships. These are (1) overlapping networks of social interaction, not dimensions, levels, or factors of a single social totality. This follows from my first statement. (2) They are also organizations, institutional means of attaining human goals. (Mann, 1986, p. 2.)

The four networks vary in size and reach at different times in history. For example, military power had a greater range throughout most of history than either political or economic power, but economic networks became even more extensive in recent centuries. Since the four networks are not encompassed within a larger social framework or any one physical territory, there is no need for concepts such as a "bounded society" or a "social system." Since there is no "totality," there can be no "subsystems," "levels," or "dimensions." Instead, social organization must be understood in terms of the four overlapping networks of power that run off in different directions and have varying extensions in physical space.

Since the emphasis is on people acting through social networks, the distinction between "social action" and "social structure," is cast aside. There no longer needs to be a periodic revival of the "agency vs. structure" debate. Because the four networks have different and constantly changing boundaries that vary with the invention of new technologies and the emergence of new organizational forms, the old division between "endogenous" and "exogenous" factors in the understanding of social conflict is discarded as "not helpful" (Mann, 1986, p. 1).

Mann underscores his general point about the interacting and intersecting nature of the four power networks by noting "the promiscuity of organizations and functions" (1986, p. 17). That is, the four networks can fuse and borrow from each other in complex ways. There are always power structures, but they vary from time to time and place to place in how the four power networks are interrelated. For example, medieval European states were "overwhelmingly, narrowly political" (Mann, 1986, p. 17) and they were autonomous, but states in modern capitalist societies are both political and economic, and they usually are not autonomous (Mann, 1993).

Mann defines the ideology network in terms of those organizations concerned with meaning, norms, and ritual practice (1986, p. 22). It generates "sacred" authority and intensifies social cohesion. Its usual manifestations are in organized religion, and its most prominent historical power actor was the Catholic Church. In all cases, it gains loyalty and financial support by providing answers to universal concerns about the origins of humanity, death, the purpose of life, the reasons for guilt feelings, and other existential questions.

The economic network is that set of institutions concerned with satisfying material needs through the "extraction, transformation, distribution and consumption of the objects of nature" (Mann, 1986, p. 24). The economic network gives rise to classes, which can be defined as positions in a social structure that are shaped by their power over the different parts of the economic process. The most powerful economic class is called a "ruling" or "dominant" class if it "has successfully monopolized other power sources to dominate a state-centered society at large" (Mann, 1986, p. 25). Geographically extensive classes arose only slowly in Western history, because they were dependent upon advances in infrastructure made possible by developments in the other power networks. For the first 2500 years of Western civilization, economic networks were extremely localized, especially in comparison to political and military networks.

Because economic classes are also social relationships between groups of people who often have different interests, the economic network can generate class conflicts, which are

disagreements over such matters as ownership, profit margins, wage rates, working conditions, and unionization. Class conflicts can manifest themselves in ways that range from workplace protests and strikes to industry-wide boycotts and collective bargaining to nationwide political actions.

However, class conflict is not inevitably present because both owners and workers, the most likely rival classes in recent times, have to have the means to organize themselves over an extended area of social space for conflict to occur. For much of Western history, there have been well-organized dominant classes, but class conflict has been important only in certain periods of Western history, such as ancient Greece, early Rome, and the present capitalist era. That's because non-owning classes usually find it very difficult to organize themselves.

The military network is defined in terms of organized physical violence. It is the power of direct and immediate coercion. As already noted, military power had a greater range throughout most of history than either political or economic power. Even so, we often forget that until very recently an army could only carry enough food for a 50-60 mile march, which forced it to rely on the local countryside in extensive military campaigns.

Historically, many armies fought for the benefit of their own leaders, who created "empires of domination" by taking over newly arisen civilizations based on the economic, ideological, and political networks. In more recent centuries military networks usually are in the service of a political network, but they still can be separate from it, as seen with guerrilla armies based in subjugated ethnic groups and terrorist organizations based in ideological networks.

Although most theorists regard military power as one aspect of state power, there are four good historical reasons for distinguishing political and military power. First, the original states had little or no military capability. Second, most historical states have not controlled all the military forces within the territory they claim to regulate. Third, there are historical instances of conquest undertaken by armies that were not controlled by the states where they resided. Fourth, the military is usually separate from other state institutions even when it is officially controlled by the state, making possible the overthrow of the political elite by military leaders (Mann, 1986, p. 11).

The fourth and final network, "the state," is defined as a political network whose primary function is territorial regulation (Mann, 1986, p. 26-27). Its usefulness in laying down rules and adjudicating disputes in specific territories is the source of its uniqueness (Mann, 1984; Mann, 1986). This unique function is the basis for its potential autonomy, but it gains further autonomy due to the fact that it interacts with other states, especially through warfare (Mann, 1986, p. 511). The state can take on other functions besides territorial regulation and has had varying degrees of influence at different phases of Western history (Mann, 1977; Mann, 1986, p. 514).

People in general, and the economic network in particular, desperately need the regulatory and judicial services offered by the political network. Groups of people may be in general cooperative, but there are always disagreements here and there, and inevitably a few people who are a real pain in the neck, disputing every little issue, pushing themselves forward, and on and on (you know them well, no doubt). No other network is capable of providing regulations and a judicial system for sustained periods of time. Thus, the Four Networks theory does not put any emphasis on coercion or domination in explaining the origins of the state.

Archaeological and historical evidence support this view. The earliest states had coordination functions, and were most closely allied with religious institutions, if not a direct outgrowth of them. Organized violence and class domination came later (Mann 1986, pp. 49-63, 84-87).

Looking at the growth and development of the four networks in Western history, Mann concludes that our theoretical goals as social scientists must be tempered by a respect for the complex realities of history. The historical record does not bear out the claims of any one "grand theory." There are too many exceptions. Lower-level, contingent generalizations are the best we can do. There seems to be a pattern in Western history, but only barely, and this pattern is conditioned by a number of historical accidents, not by some inevitable and immanent societal principles (1986, pp. 531-532). The "European miracle," meaning the tremendous growth in power resources over the past several hundred years, is seen as "a series of giant coincidences" (Mann, 1986, p. 505).

In the terminology that has been adopted since the 1990s, history is "path-dependent." It follows along the path that was taken at key choice points where things could have gone more than one way. Although these new paths sometimes involve mundane choices like the way in which typewriter keyboards were organized, the most important new paths usually involve power struggles between nation-states or classes within nation-states. For example, the world would be very different today if Hitler had not attacked Great Britain and the Soviet Union at the same time, undercutting the strong possibility that he might have solidified his control of continental Europe.

Because all large-scale civilizations and nation-states have been connected to each other in one way or another for several thousand years, comparative studies are far more limited in their usefulness than many social scientists believe. That's because there really aren't enough separate social systems to make meaningful comparisons, and comparisons back and forth in historical time can be downright silly due to the vastly different levels of power development at different historical epochs (Mann, 1986, pp. 173, 501-503, 525). For the most burning questions, historical studies of specific countries or systems of nation-states are the best we can do. This historical emphasis recalls C. Wright Mills's (1962, pp. 119-126) similar admonitions, and it justifies the kind of detailed studies that have characterized research on contemporary power structures.

Even the rise of independent civilizations in only four or five separate places was in good part due to a combination of relatively rare geographical coincidences, not evolutionary inevitability. Mann shows that in many times and places pre-historical social groups reached a level of social development that seemed to suggest that civilization -- defined in terms of cities, ceremonial centers, and writing -- was about to appear, only to fall back or remain at the same level. Significantly, one factor in this "failure" to develop civilizations may have been the ability of ordinary people to control the actions of their leaders, either by resisting or moving to a new group, thereby depriving the would-be power trippers of their base. People seemed to fear the development of full-fledged power structures (Mann, 1986, pp. 38-39, 67-68).

Before civilizations emerged, there may have been "inverted power structures" in which the rank-and-file could discipline would-be dominators through gossip, scorn, shunning, and if need be, assassination (Boehm, 1999). Only where river flooding allowed the possibility of alluvial agriculture, in conjunction with close proximity to geographical areas that encouraged different but complementary networks, did the "caging" of populations make possible the development of the fixed power structures of domination and exploitation that have characterized all civilizations. The strong egalitarian tendencies that characterized pre-historic social groups were submerged when power seekers could build on a religious, economic, military, or political base to gain control of others.

The Origins of Modern-Day Power Structures in Europe

To understand the American power structure, we first have to consider briefly the power structures in the European civilizations that created colonies in what is now the United States.

The modern era of state and class relations in Europe had its origins in the first few centuries after the disintegration of the Roman Empire between 337 and 476 A.D. The institution of private property developed in the context of a system of numerous small, weak states that struggled along in the territory previously dominated by the militarized Roman state. This economic development was made possible by the "normative pacification" provided by the Catholic Church, which increased greatly in its power, and by the predominance of military techniques that rendered armored knights on horseback ascendant over serfs and peasants (Mann, 1986, pp. 376-378, 390-391).

In this context, it is important to note, feudal lords did not need "states" to protect their private property and increase the exploitation of producing classes. They dominated the peasantry through their own military capabilities in a context where religion played a role in sustaining and justifying hierarchy. Moreover, the weakness of the many small states was one factor that allowed the system of private property to take deeper root without the danger of state appropriation, and for an independent merchant class to develop. The result was a growing independence for the economic network in general: "By the time trade was really buoyant

(1150 to 1250 A.D.)," claims Mann (1986, p. 397), "it was accompanied by merchant and artisan institutions with an autonomy unparalleled in other civilizations."

Put more strongly, weak states and a common religious ideology made it possible for economic networks in Europe to obtain a degree of independence that is not found elsewhere. The history of China, for example, is a history of states fighting back and forth to gain the upper hand. First, there were many small states, then one big state that eventually overextended itself, followed by hundreds of years of many smaller states, and then the cycle repeated itself into the 20th century, when the Chinese Communist Party created an extremely strong state after its 1949 triumph. The ideology network is always at the service of the state -- no independent religious organizations developed in China. And the means of organized violence are controlled by states, except when militarized outsiders march in and conquer the Chinese state or states. Then these warlords monopolize violence for themselves as the new state rulers, and become assimilated into Chinese society.

Where are the economic networks in Chinese history? Well, agricultural surpluses and trading networks were important in making it all possible, but they were always under the thumb of the state. There was no significant period, let alone a 1000-year time span, as during the Middle Ages in Europe, when economic networks had a fair degree of independence. This comparison does not make European history any less hierarchical and brutal for the great mass of people, but it does make it different.

During Europe's Middle Ages, to repeat, the state had very few functions. It consisted primarily of the king and his retainers, and the bulk of its revenues came from the king's own lands and judicial fees. It tried to guard its borders and control armies in its territory, and it had a role in settling some types of disputes within its confines, but it was not a major player. Strikingly, any increases in its budget were directly tied to warfare and war debts. That continued to be the case even after the state began to gain some importance as a regulator of economic activity within its boundaries (Mann, 1986, pp. 486, 511) and to supplant the Church as the primary means of normative pacification. As late as 1505, the powers of the state were minimal:

Paying the expenses of his household, buying the political advice of a few counselors, administering supreme justice, regulating trade across territorial boundaries, issuing a coinage, and waging occasional war with the help of loyal barons -- that was the sum of state functions, which almost certainly involved less than one percent of national wealth and were marginal to the lives of most of the state's subjects. (Mann, 1986, p. 452.)

Although private property and the first stages of capitalism developed without strong states, the situation began to change in the 12th and 13th centuries for a number of reasons. As markets grew within state boundaries, there was more and more need for state regulation. As merchants increased the scope of their trade into larger and larger territories, they needed more protection against bandits and the petty rulers of small territories (Mann, 1986, pp. 423-424, 431-32). Merchants also developed an interest in aggressive wars that would widen the territory in which they could operate: "From now on commercial motivations, the conquest of markets as well as land, were to play a part in wars" (Mann, 1986, p. 432). Merchants thus quietly encouraged the growth of the state, lending it the money necessary to raise a larger army.

Moreover, dramatic -- and, of course, unanticipated -- developments in the military network also triggered changes in the relationship between private property and the state. The sudden emergence of the disciplined military phalanx, that is, spear-armed infantry in close formation, quickly led to the defeat of nobles on horseback in a series of dramatic battles between 1302 and 1315 (Mann, 1986, pp. 18-19, 428). In this new context, the nobility had to turn increasingly to the state to raise a standing army of full-time foot soldiers to protect its lands. Now it started to be the case that the state was an "instrument of domination" in the service of the economic elites in general.

There soon followed a series of technological innovations that added up to a "military revolution" (Mann, 1986, pp. 453-454). In particular, large artillery guns made it possible to destroy castles. The arms race among states was on. It didn't begin after World War II ended in 1945. To the contrary, there have been few peaceful interludes between 1300 and the present. Only states with large armies could survive, and only states that could gain the loyalty of lords

and merchants could afford large armies.

So, from that point forward capitalism and the nation-state gradually grew powerful together because they needed and aided each other. As the alliance between these two power networks solidified, they subordinated the previously independent ideological and military networks. States now began to fit the usual sociological definition: the organization that controls the military and police within a given geographical area. And when a state extended its regulatory powers over a new territory, so too did capitalism diffuse more fully into that territory. Contrary to the oft-expressed view that classes and states are antagonistic, they became closely intertwined in Western history.

True enough, the class system generated by capitalism was segmented into a small number of "class-nations" of roughly equal power that together formed a multi-state system. And, yes, from the start there was also tension within each state between the top bananas in the two dominant networks of modern Western civilization -- between economic elites and political elites. Feudal lords wanted protection for their lands, and merchants wanted protection and regulation for their goods and markets, but both feared the taxing power of the state elites (Mann, 1986, p. 433). Conversely, state elites tried to gain as much autonomy as they could. Much of Western history from this time forward is about the deadly bickering between economic and political elites, with an occasional time-out to deal with peasants or artisans who tried to take advantage of the divisions in elite circles.

As the power of the market system developed, merchants, lords, and rich peasants gradually merged into a capitalist class in many of these countries. However, there were some differences from country to country. Constitutional regimes fostered the unity of a property-owning class. Absolutist regimes tended to preserve the social structure of feudalism. Either way, these European states were not very powerful in relation to the dominant class or classes:

Thus constitutional and absolutist regimes were subtypes of a single form of state: a weak state in relation to the powerful groups of civil society, but a state that increasingly coordinated those groups' activities to the point where we may begin to talk of an organic class-nation whose central point was either the court or the court/parliament of the state. (Mann, 1986, p. 481.)

Gradually, but only gradually, the relationship between dominant classes and the state became even closer and their interests began to merge. "In the 17th and 18th centuries," concludes Mann (1986, p. 516), "it begins to make sense to describe the state -- paraphrasing Marx -- as an executive committee for managing the common affairs of the capitalist class." This is because the state had no distributive power over the classes of "civil society" and because power flowed "primarily from economic power relations to the state" (Mann, 1986, p. 516). Within this general framework, there were large differences among European countries between 1760 and 1914, as Mann (1993) also documents with unique data sets and many historical comparisons.

Although Mann's Four Networks theory and Marxism come to somewhat similar conclusions for the years after, say, 1790, this does not mean that Marx's analyses of key historical events in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries were necessarily correct. In fact, there is reason to believe from historical studies that they were not. Generally speaking, Marx overstated the importance of industrial capitalists as compared to landed elites within the ruling circles of the 19th century, and of urban workers as compared to other urban dwellers and peasants (Hamilton, 1991).

Based on this history, it's clear to me that questions about the relative power of states and social classes cannot be answered in the abstract for any time period, including the modern era. States may become relatively autonomous by playing nobles off against merchants, or one set of capitalists against another. But they also can be dominated by a coalition of social classes, or by a single dominant class. They can become so powerful militarily that they can extract resources from civil society. And they even can be dominated by a fervent ideological network under the right circumstances (Iran since 1979, for example). None of these possibilities should be precluded beforehand.

And that brings us to a very general overview of the structure and distribution of power in the United States. How does power operate in this particular democratic capitalist country? Does

power belong to the people through their elected representatives and their organized interest groups, as the pluralists claim, with the state serving as an impartial umpire that tries to reach compromises among the differing classes and factions?

Or is power lodged in the institutional elites who run the corporate, political, and military institutions of the society, as Mills (1956) claimed? Or is there a dominant capitalist class, as Marxist and non-Marxist class-domination theorists claim? Or do state elites dominate both capitalists and non-capitalists, either in their own interests or in the interests of the capitalist system, as the state autonomy theorists claim?

To a certain extent, these issues are a matter of degree. A class-domination theorist such as myself, for example, certainly agrees that elections can matter, and that workers, environmentalists, or other challengers can win on some issues. It is the more general framework that is being argued about.

The Four Networks in the United States

How does the Four Networks theory apply to the United States? This section shows why it is plausible to suggest that there is class domination in the United States, especially compared to most other democratic capitalist countries. Economic elites have had no serious power rivals in the United States for a number of complex historical reasons.

When the United States is viewed in historical-comparative perspective as a fragment of the European system of capitalist nation-states, there is a *prima facie* case that leaders from the capitalist class are more powerful than in European nations and in comparison to any other group or the federal government. First, America did not have a feudal past, so its capitalists were not hindered by a rival economic class that had to be battled, assimilated, or deferred to in attempting to dominate the state. Conversely, the absence of such a rival economic elite meant that the state could not play off one strong economic class against another in an attempt to gain autonomy from the capitalist elites.

In Europe, the feudal landlords and state elites were able to limit the rise of corporate capitalism, and even to insist that capitalists had to bargain with organized workers. In the United States, there were no restraints on the rise of giant corporations from these sources, and the corporations were able to eliminate most attempts at union organization. That is a huge difference in terms of the wealth and income distribution, and in terms of the use of government to provide collective social benefits like health care insurance and a good retirement income.

By the late 19th century, the nationwide nature of the transportation and communication systems, and the commonality of language, education, and culture, meant that the bases for class solidarity were present for both corporate owners and their employees, although the corporate community was far more cohesiveness than the working class for a variety of reasons. Still, class conflict over wages, hours, working conditions, and other issues has frequently manifested itself since the late 19th century. Contrary to pluralists and state autonomy theorists, and in agreement with Marxists on this issue, I believe class conflict was the single most important factor (but not the only factor) driving American politics in the 20th century, even overshadowing the more visible and violent struggles over racial inclusion and exclusion.

But it was not just the absence of a rival economic elite (a feudal nobility rooted in the exploitation of peasant agriculture) that made it possible for capitalists to become dominant. There was no institutionalized church either, which meant that there was no ideology network that could rival them for power. Fragmented as it was from the outset into many rival Christian denominations, the ideology network has been subordinate to the economic and political networks. The historical role of churches also has been limited through the separation of church and state by the Founding Fathers, reflecting both the weak nature of the church network at the time and the Founders' own secular tendencies.

Since the 1960s, secular organizations like self-help groups and psychotherapy cults have enjoyed some success in providing meaning to the college-educated middle class, but churches remain the most important organizations in fulfilling this human need for Americans.

Protestant churches in particular always have had an enormous role in producing American morality and culture. However, their constant splintering into new denominations, and then further schisms within the dominations, has limited them as a source of power.

True, the Catholic church was a power base in some urban areas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through the Democratic party, often making alliances with local political machines. More recently its power has been limited to realms like abortion and school prayer, where it plays a potent role. When thinking of religious power today, it is conservative Christian churches that often come to mind, but African-American churches, especially in the South, are a significant power base. So, I can agree that ideological organizations have some political influence in the United States, but they are less important than in many other countries.

Furthermore, capitalists were able to come to power because the United States has not had a strong, independent, centralized state for a variety of historical reasons that are very familiar. First, the pre-revolutionary history of the United States as a set of separate colonial territories outside the context of the European multi-state system led to a federal form of government with many government functions located at the state as compared to the national level. The state level in turn ceded some of its power to the city level, where landed elites -- "place entrepreneurs" -- have been able to form [growth coalitions](#) that persuade local governments to protect and enhance their interest in intensifying land use (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Molotch, 1976; Molotch, 1979; Molotch, 1999).

The rivalries among the economic elites of the various states within the new United States were a second major factor in keeping the American national government limited in its scope until the 1930s at the earliest. The Founding Fathers created a system of checks and balances at the national level that has made the powerful legislative branch of the American government very accessible to elite economic groups. In particular, the rural agricultural party of Jefferson (the Democrats), which won out politically over the urban industrial party of Hamilton (roughly speaking, the Federalists/Whigs/Republicans) until the Civil War, worked very hard to keep the federal government small. It is my claim that the plantation capitalists of the South, after finding a few allies in the North, played an enormous role in restraining the growth of a strong centralized state that might challenge their domination of their African-American workforce, first through slavery, then through Jim Crow laws and the share-cropping system.

Even under these circumstances, the federal government has forced changes in power arrangements in the South twice, first through the Civil War in the 1860s, then through its support for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. These defeats at the hands of Washington reinforced the anti-government ideology of white Southerners, who refuse to forget what they see as a humiliation. Even today, the fiercely anti-government stance that pervades Southern white culture is a major barrier for those who would like to have the federal government take more responsibility for many social, educational, health, and science programs. This does not mean that wealthy white Southerners reject the many subsidies they have extracted from the federal government since the 1870s, but it does mean they have created an ideology that allows them to keep that government from helping ordinary citizens to any great extent.

The small size of the 19th-century American state meant there were powerful corporations before there was a large national government, another contrast of major importance with Europe (Mills, 1956, p. 272). The corporate elites that arose after the Civil War thus had a big impact on how the national government grew, contrary to what the pluralists and state autonomy theorists claim (Domhoff, 1970, Chapter 6; Domhoff, 1990, Chapters 4-6; Domhoff, 1996, Chapters 3-5). With the coming of World War II, and the Cold War, of course, there was no choice but to expand the state dramatically, but that expansion was completely controlled by the corporate capitalists (Domhoff, 1996, Chapter 6).

Finally, the lack of any dangerous rival states on American borders, along with the protection from European states provided by the British navy throughout most of the 19th century, meant that the capitalist class in the United States did not have to contend with a "permanent military establishment" until World War II (see Mills, 1956, Chapter 8, for an excellent account of these matters). The American government most certainly had an army that played a large role historically in taking territory from Native Americans, Spain, and Mexico. However, it was never big enough for long enough until the second World War to be considered a serious

contender for power. By that time civilian traditions were long established.

As for the many wars in which the United States has been involved since 1949, they were decided upon by elected officials and by corporate leaders appointed to important positions in the state and defense departments, not by military leaders itching for a fight. The 2003 invasion of Iraq is a perfect example. It was the product of assertive nationalists like Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, both former corporate CEOs, and the neoconservative ideologues they brought with them to government from right-wing think tanks. Most, if not all, of these pro-war civilians had carefully avoided military service in Vietnam after their graduation from college. President George W. Bush found refuge in the Texas Air National Guard, from which he took an extended leave of absence (Schweizer & Schweizer, 2004, pp. 191-195).

The United States Army was so small after the Civil War that the increasingly ascendant corporations often created their own organizations of violence to break strikes or resist unions, or else hired private specialists in such work. The largest of the private armies in that era, the Pinkerton Detective Agency, "had more men than the U.S. Army" (Mann, 1993, p. 646). The American government did not even try to stop organized corporate violence until the 1930s. That's because most of the unionization efforts by workers were defined by judges as violations of property rights and/or of the right to freedom of contract. Employers thus had a legitimate right to "defend" their property and hire replacement workers. When it came to using organized violence to enforce the law, though, the corporate leaders had to hire private armies (Mann, 1993, pp. 645-48).

So, when we turn to the current power structure in the United States, and look into the details of class domination by the corporate community and its power elite, we have to remember that the absence of feudal economic elites, the fragmented nature of the ideology network, the weakness of the decentralized government, and the small size of the military -- each explainable in historical terms -- all contributed to this outcome. It's not that the capitalists were somehow stronger or better in the United States. Instead, they found themselves in ideal circumstances in terms of the relationships among the four major power networks.

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